

Challenges to Improving Governance in Participatory Forest Management

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Abstract

Failure to embrace equity and good governance practices has dogged forest management in the tropics for a long time. The most cited reason for the failure is the licensing of forest products, which in turn determines community access rights to forest products. Communities "participate" through watching timber logs being carted away by lorries for processing in far away centres. The poorest households, women and other marginalised groups, often bear the greatest burden in relative terms. As a result, communities have developed a very negative attitude towards forest management to a point of not participating in putting out a forest fire if not being the arsonists themselves. With the introduction of Participatory Forest Management in Kenya in the late 1990s, stakeholders in forest management are witnessing development of Community Forest Associations (CFAs). The CFAs are viewed as vehicles for inculcating equity and good governance in forest management. Preliminary field surveys of selected CFAs using Rapid Rural Appraisal tools, reveal that some groups are facing the same equity and governance problems which were earlier observed in the management of the forestry sector before the emergence of PFM. The source of these problems are: weak CFAs composed of members of one tribe in multi-ethnic communities, CFAs formed from one village despite the PFM area covering several villages, CFAs composed of members of one clan even though the CFA cuts across several villages which have several clans. The other key challenge is elitism where retired and those retrenched from public and private employment through structural adjustment programmes hold key positions in the local CFAs. One extreme case witnessed during a survey carried out in Kenya was a CFA where one family held all the leadership positions: chairman (the father), treasurer (daughter-in-law) and secretary (the son).

1 Introduction

Governance is a second generation issue in PFM implementation process on the African continent, which is now handled as a 1st generation issue to be in tune with the Asian countries where PFM has been practised for over 30 years. It also follows upon the realisation that every issue in the implementation of PFM revolves around fair and just treatment of all stakeholders. Such issues are at the heart of governance.

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In Kenya, the key governance issues that are of concern to all the CFAs are: i) the development of forest management guidelines, ii) the development of local forest management by-laws, and iii) the signing of forest management agreements with the Kenya Forest Service, which is the government arm concerned with the management of forest resources in the country. These issues are not being addressed equitably by those engaged in the implementation of PFM processes in the country, possibly due to the lack of adequate involvement and empowerment of local communities. In many cases, PFM process facilitators have the upper hand in determining the direction and influencing the outcomes of the process. This problem is more pronounced in forests where the responsible authority and/or NGOs lead the process with minimal participation of other local participants, particularly members of the local communities.

2 Some Governance Issues in PFM Implementation

2.1 Involvement by external forces

Community Forest Associations (CFAs) leadership is established through external support. The key challenge in this is that the facilitators do not let go or work as partners with the CFAs. This curtails the development of the CFAs and by extension, the institutionalisation of PFM in the country.

2.2 Exclusion of indigenous local communities

In most forest communities that participate in PFM, outsiders – most of whom are better resourced than the indigenous communities – take up leadership positions. This leads to inequitable distribution of PFM benefits and networks among the participants. As a result, the local community, together with the poor who do not have well-developed relationships with the outsiders, face greater challenges in securing their livelihoods. The local communities are therefore likely to be turned away from the implementation of the PFM process.

2.3 Manipulation of meetings and election procedures

In most forests where communities are involved in the PFM process, CFA leadership is manipulated to suit the interests of the facilitating organizations that have controlling power over the CFA annual general meetings (AGMs) and the usual changes in management. The community leadership adapts to these demands by appointing chairpersons who are young and literate. The advantage of this is that the chairperson is compelled to consult widely, and though this may delay the process, the community at the same time gets enough time to internalize the issues, thereby enhancing the chances of making the right decision with broader community acceptance. As a coping strategy, CFAs more often than not elect retired civil servants to lead their committees. This results in elite capture, with the poor and other marginalized community members becoming totally isolated and disadvantaged. Yet PFM is considered a pro-poor approach to natural resource management! In most cases, the CFA constitutions are written by few elites for the purpose of registration. CFA members are usually recruited after the registration has been completed. Most members at first do not understand the by-laws and guidelines, and

this weighs down on the good functioning of the CFAs, often resulting in conflicts that may eventually lead to the premature breaking-up of the associations. There is therefore a need to sensitise members on PFM before forming the CFA and promote transparency and accountability along the process.

Even though election procedures are described in the CFAs' constitutions, they are not actualized because of lack of resources. Where they are applied, adequate awareness is not created. Thus, a few families control the executive committee or, rather than correcting bad governance, the elections aim at removing current office bearers who demand accountability.

2.4 Traditional governance systems and the PFM process

Traditional governance systems do not ask the traditional chief/senior officer to be accountable to the subjects. This is contrary to the current governance paradigm, which demands that all should be held accountable while in public service. If the pro-poor PFM approach is to succeed, capacity-building of CFAs is necessary to ensure that the CFA leadership and other stakeholders embody the emerging governance attributes. This does not preclude some cases, from operating in the traditional African setting.

2.5 Demand for accountability in PFM implementation

PFM introduces a governance system in the forestry sector whereby communities are seen to demand accountability from other stakeholders. Communities are encouraged to enter into partnerships with other organizations in developing and implementing project proposals, but their internal systems are not adequate. CFAs need a high level of accountability to be able to demand accountability from other stakeholders. This issue is also important when dealing with the sharing of benefits and costs in the PFM process. Transparency, openness and accountability are still low in most CFAs. Financial reporting on group accounts and revenue are areas that need improvement. Out of the five sites where this study was carried out, none of the CFAs had done their end of year financial reports.

2.6 Interest of communities and individuals

PFM participation depends on both the community and individuals, but the interests of either of these entities may vary. This needs to be addressed at both levels. The success of community participation depends on meeting the needs and the interests of the participating household members. This calls for good governance practices at the household level, where the challenge is that the youth and women do most of the work while the men do little but make almost all decisions.

2.7 Lack of women representation

Women and the youth are not usually represented in the top management of CFAs, and those holding positions have been put there to meet donor/project demands. This can be seen in cases where female chairpersons do not conduct meetings and instead, these are being hijacked by non-elected men. Especially when there are visitors, there is a tendency for non-elected male members to take over the

meetings. The chairwoman remains disillusioned and assumes the position of an ordinary member.

2.8 Sharing of costs and benefits

Decisions on sharing the proceeds from PFM IGAs are skewed towards men although youth and women provide most of the labour for PFM activities. The poor who rarely attend meetings hardly ever get PFM incentives like beehives because the conditions set are too high. Yet, it is the poor and the women among the CFA members who give most of their time and money when it comes to meeting the costs in CFA operations. Men tend to be more active in forest activities where there is direct economic benefit while women and youth are active in combining both economic and biodiversity concerns. Men need to be sensitized on non-consumptive benefits of forests.

3 Other Issues Important in the Management of CFAs in Kenya

There are other issues that are important in the implementation of the PFM process in Kenya and have some bearing on governance of CFAs.

3.1 Forests as sources of livelihoods

Many communities and individuals participate in forest management groups and associations because of the benefits the forests provide. These are usually ranked as livelihood benefits. Table 1 shows that the ranking usually differs according to whether one is a woman or a man. For example, women from Kereita forest, which is about 40 km from the city of Nairobi, ranked forests as a source of vegetables; men from the same forest ranked fruit tree farming as the most important product from the forest followed by tea and coffee trees. Because of the forest's proximity to Nairobi, cash crops were ranked highly by both men and women.

Table 1 Ranking of livelihoods sources from Kereita forest

Activity	Gender	Ranking
Horticulture (fruit farming)	Men	6
Vegetables ((kales, cabbages)	Both	4
Cereals (Maize)	Women	5
Cash crops (tea/coffee)	Women	3
Livestock (dairy cows /sheep)	Both	2
Forest products*	F - Fire wood M - Pastures M - Handicrafts	1

*Forest products were ranked highly because they directly affect all the other livelihood sources like livestock through grazing; vegetables through water from the forest, etc.

3.2 Education level of household members and effect on participation in CFAs

Illiteracy among CFA members is very high (Fig. 2). Coupled with the reluctance of most PFM process facilitators to use participatory tools that can involve people

without educational background, this affects the introduction and sustenance of good governance in most CFAs. There is therefore a need to promote the use of participatory tools like mapping, signs and local language during the facilitation of PFM processes. Such an approach would also help in the interpretation of memoranda, management plans and even the constitutions of the CFAs.

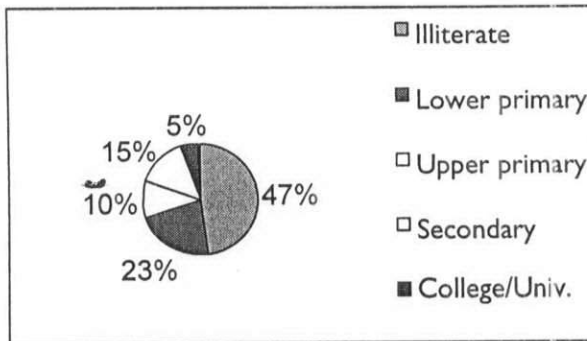


Figure 2 Education levels of sample households

3.3 Avoiding institutional capture in CFAs

Cooperation and partnership among NGOs, government agencies and members of local CFA communities lead to compromises in the way each member operates. In most cases, this results in institutional capture by the stronger institutions and leads to inefficiencies in negotiation, leadership, and conflict resolution processes. The facilitating organization often determines and influences decision-making, election of officials and even the calendar of activities. By extension it eventually becomes part of the CFA. This state of affairs needs to be addressed and where possible curtailed right from the beginning of the PFM process. Making use of participatory tools ensures visual sharing of information among the various stakeholders and also leads to a situation where the weaker members of the CFAs are empowered to take control of the process. Empowerment of the CFA members can further be assured through continuous training using participatory tools throughout the process.

3.4 Political vs. social capital

In most CFAs attendance of meetings for PFM activities is usually high. In a study on the Kereita forest, participants were divided into different categories, A, B, C and D depending on their income levels. People in categories A and B contributed more in decision-making than those in categories D and C. Only 44% of the members speak in such meetings. Categories A and D were the least represented in the elections. While for category A this was by choice, for category D it was due to their low social and economic status in the community. The rich have the means to attend but choose not to owing to other commitments, yet can still access PFM benefits. There is clearly a need to take the views of the poor into consideration in PFM meetings.

The implementation of the new Forest Act in Kenya requires that both the Forestry Service and the CFA members be involved in managing the forest resources, based on the management plans developed jointly between the two parties. However, the executive committee members are more versed in such matters than the poor ordinary members. It is expected that the training officers will pass knowledge about

PFM to non-PFM members and encourage them to join the CFA. Instead of enhancing the political capital of the committee members, it is more prudent for the PFM facilitators to enhance the social capital of the CFA members and encourage them to form links and networks among themselves as well as with non-members who may have valuable experiences to share. This will enable them get both technical and financial support from other partners. Networking sometimes involves members in informal meetings outside the PFM process.

4 Conclusions and Way Forward

The use of social mapping tools – such as listing all the households found within close proximity of the forest, mapping the households in relation to the forest and as per the communities' perception of who can be involved, and determining the households status guided by the community – could greatly enhance the success of the PFM process.

The use of social mapping tools makes communities participate in identifying who is involved in PFM by incurring costs and who is benefiting from the process. The tool can be used to give a clear picture of whether the poor also receive benefits from the process or not. The use of social mapping tools opens up discussions and provides evidence on whether or not the rights of the poor have been addressed in the PFM process. The tools provide an opportunity to enhance a pro-poor approach to PFM in the implementation of PFM projects and programmes.

This calls for putting in place systems that hybridize traditional and modern equity and governance systems. An attempt at doing this has been done through social mapping to make the community realize their equity and governance failures and opportunities and consultatively develop better management systems.

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